



INNOVATOR

A Small World After All

A Futurallia veteran and local business owner brings the international market to Kansas City's backdoor

STORY BY **NATALIE MCALLISTER** | PHOTO BY **STEVE PUPPE**

FAST FACTS ▶

- ▶ Jami Henry
- ▶ President and chief operating officer of Bellewether Ltd.
- ▶ Company Profile: Bellewether provides business consulting services focused on strategic practice analysis, business process management and documentation/electronic content management.

Alchemy: a power capable of transforming something ordinary into something truly special. For a small business owner or a budding entrepreneur, such a transformation could bridge the gap between being “just another startup” and becoming a global powerhouse. Unfortunately, finding the key to moving into the national or international marketplace comes at a financial cost that most startups simply cannot afford—or so they think.

In actuality, with the introduction of online meetings and video conferencing via services like Skype, conducting international business is more affordable than ever. And in an increasingly global business climate, the alchemy necessary for Kansas City entrepreneurs to break into the market at a small personal cost is right at our front door.

“Alchemy” is the word Jami Henry, a small business owner herself, chooses to describe her first experience at the 2008 Futurallia event in Quebec, Canada. Attending as part of a delegation of six Kansas City

companies commissioned by the Kauffman Foundation to explore the purpose and impact of Futurallia events, Henry and her colleagues were stunned by the sheer number of global business owners and entrepreneurs in attendance.

“When we walked in that first day, it was just awesome,” Henry says. “There were 1,200 people from all over the world. It was an international enclave of small business owners and entrepreneurs. My expectations were exceeded; we did not get the breadth of this thing until we walked in the door.”

In Kansas City for its 16th edition next month (May 18–20), Futurallia attracts in excess of 800 entrepreneurs from more than 40 countries for two days of 16 pre-arranged meetings with fellow business owners who share common goals. Past events have been held in international markets like Belgium, Poland, Qatar and France, each a blend of business match-making, speed dating and B2B networking

both outlets and solutions for their business models that might take years to find in an individual search.

“Imagine a room filled with small business owners and entrepreneurs,” Henry says. “For another business owner or an entrepreneur, it’s kind of like a candy store.”

Henry had been to large networking events before, but she knew Futurallia was something special as soon as she met with her second pre-selected connection, Pierre Lalonde, president of Kiwi Technologies Inc., based in Quebec. At the time of their first meeting, Henry’s 17-year-old management consulting company, Bellewether Ltd., needed a new partner to assist in the development of a better delivery platform for its business services consultations. Henry’s current model was effective, but the expense of running it through a third party was cutting out a sizeable chunk of Bellewether’s profits.

“He picked me and I picked him,” Henry says. “We realized there was continuity between what our companies wanted to

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totaling nearly 9,000 meetings. Businesses from a wide range of backgrounds are offered the unique opportunity to network outside of their traditional sector, and owners find

do. Before we left, we decided to explore a partnership together, and, just two years later, we have created a product that we have now launched.”

Henry and Lalonde's new product, Human Asset Imaging Inventory, was recently launched as a 128-question, knowledge-based assessment designed to measure what participants already know or need to learn about a client company's eight dimensions of effective interpersonal skills.

Running the Human Asset Imaging Inventory on Lalonde's platform has decreased expenses for Bellewether by around 70 percent—"critical for a small firm," Henry says.

Lalonde's business also has benefited financially, as well as from the exposure created by the international partnership. "And because of Futurallia, Bellewether is now an international company," Henry says. "Everybody got to win."

Following Henry's positive Futurallia experience, she began to wonder how the Kauffman Foundation's delegation could bring the event to Kansas City. It seemed like such an event would be beneficial to the international potential of the city.

"A small group of us stood there at the end of the first evening and wondered, 'What if we could get this to Kansas City?'" she recalls.

The delegation didn't waste any time trying. Today, Henry serves as chair of the Futurallia Kansas City Marketing Committee, also known as the Leadership Team. In this role she supported the tasks of landing and marketing the event—a process that included beating out other contenders like Atlanta and Charlotte, North Carolina—as well as showing the Futurallia Committee, based in Poitiers, France, around the city. Ultimately, the committee awarded the 2011 event to Kansas City due to the metro's size, heritage (which includes both French and Spanish influence), central location and extensive variety of entertainment venues.

"I think the committee saw the level of enthusiasm and commitment that the people involved had to make it happen," Henry says. "Kansas City is a great center point [with] an international reach that is

underplayed. A lot of Kansas City companies do international business. [We really are] an entrepreneurial city."

And attending Futurallia should be a "no-brainer" for Kansas City business owners and entrepreneurs, Henry says. Given the cost of making contacts and expanding a business into the international theater, many business owners don't believe that they have the capacity to get involved abroad. But Futurallia participants can make at least 16 contacts with global players for the entry fee of approximately \$1,000—contacts that could cost thousands of dollars more using traditional business development methods.

"Most of the world likes to do business based on relationships," Henry explains. "The sale is important, but the relationship is even more important. With the relationship, you can have years of success together. The process of breaking into an international market is so costly, but these companies have been vetted. You don't have to track them down."

Henry believes that the matches made at Futurallia are the exact reason why this event is so beneficial to business owners. Unlike other networking or matchmaking opportunities, where agencies might send representatives who have no real control

over the company, authority to write a contract or motivation to reconnect with the people they meet, Futurallia pairs decision makers with other decision makers. These power partnerships can morph into new opportunities for global importing, exporting and business development. And, with such a low attendance cost, the risk of reaching across national borders is considerably more tolerable than it would be if the effort were being made solely from a company's corporate headquarters. For Kansas City residents who don't have to include flights or hotels on their expense sheet, the risk is even lower.

"From a Kansas City [business owner] perspective, you have very little to lose," Henry says. "The world is coming to Kansas City, and all you have to do is get to the Convention Center."

An enormous influx of international companies is already planning to attend Futurallia 2011: At press time, Henry put the number near several hundred with more expected to reserve a spot as the event gets closer.

"I hope as many companies as possible from Kansas City get on board," Henry says. "Technology makes international business possible. You may never even have to take a trip." **KCB**

OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND ▶

Foturallia is known for its global reach, and visiting participants stand to connect Kansas City to new national and international markets in a wide range of sectors. Expectations for the May event include:

- Participants from countries including Austria, Morocco, Russia, Mexico, China, Chile and India
- Representatives from numerous sectors, including agriculture, construction, human and animal health, biotechnology, consumer goods and textiles, communications and advertising, and automotive and electronics
- Experts providing services in international law, insurance and international financial concerns
- Translation services to assist with language barriers.

For more information or to register your business, visit futuralliaKC2011.com.



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